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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABIDJAN 000623

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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

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SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: ELECTORAL COMMISSION STRUGGLES

FORWARD

REF: ABIDJAN 417

Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Four months away from the October date by which Cote d'Ivoire's postponed presidential elections are supposed to be held, the CEI (Independent Electoral Commission) has ambitious, probably unrealistic plans to carpet the country with thousands of polling stations and train tens of thousands of election workers, but it has barely started its work and does not even have a notional timetable for getting to elections. CEI president Mambe Beugre and his commission have been trying to move forward, but they face numerous obstacles, including the lack of operating funds and the absence of civilian administration in many parts of the country. The fact that more than half of Ivoirians still don't have the citizen identification cards they need to register to vote is also a serious obstacle. In this regard, tensions between the CEI and the National Commission for the Supervision of Identification (CNSI), which is responsible for issuing citizen identification cards, are not helpful. The lack of urgency among the Ivoirian actors suggests a lack of realism about what the process involves. Time to prepare for elections in October is running short. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Since its installation in March, the new CEI has been struggling to move forward. During a May 3 conference in Grand Bassam, Beugre outlined his plans. Beugre said the commission's overarching goal is to ensure that every citizen of voting age obtains all the necessary documents to enable him to exercise his civic right. For their work, the CEI has divided the country into twenty geographical regions, each with a CEI supervisory team. Within these twenty regions, there will be 427 local branches of the CEI. Each branch will have representation by from the various political parties and local authorities. They will observe and assist in pre-electoral operations and polling in the towns and villages, just as the CEI in Abidjan does on the national level.

¶3. (U) In the 2000 elections, Cote d'Ivoire had 1650 polling stations, or an average of one station every 75 square miles. For the upcoming elections, the CEI wants to have 22,000 polling stations, or an average of one every 5.7 square miles. The CEI also wants to work with journalists to create a code of conduct for the elections period, develop a CEI website, and publicize more widely the electoral code.

¶4. (SBU) In preparation for the work ahead, 24 board members of the CEI traveled on May 18-27 to various towns in Cote d'Ivoire. They visited the rebel-held, UN, and government-controlled zones and were accompanied by soldiers from the French Licorne peacekeeping force, the rebel New

Forces (NF), and the Ivoirian armed forces (FANCI). The trips were familiarization missions to have a better understanding of the challenges on the ground. Contacts in the commission tell us that the obstacles are indeed numerous and expensive and include the following:

PERSONNEL:

¶5. (C) In most of the north and some areas of the south, there is an absence of government administration. The government is waiting for disarmament to redeploy civil servants to rebel-held areas in the north and west, though some civil servants have already returned voluntarily. Without these workers, election preparations cannot begin. Furthermore, there exists a lack of election workers, especially in the west but in the north as well. During a June 2 "Friends of the Elections" meeting headed by UN High Representative for Elections Gerald Stoudman, Beugre estimated that over 80,000 personnel would have to be trained. CEI technicians, outside consultants, and NGO's would perform the training. Beugre seemed not to have completely thought through all the logistics involved in conducting nationwide training of over 80,000 people in a country with bad roads, no formal postal addressing system, and unreliable telephone lines. When asked how long the CEI estimated the training would take, he gave an unrealistic figure of two weeks.

EQUIPMENT/BUILDINGS/POWER:

¶6. (SBU) Schools and other public buildings that are used as voting locations are in disrepair throughout the country, but especially in the north and the west. There are not enough polling booths, ballot boxes, padlocks, lanterns, stamps, and generators to support the elections. Many villages do not have power at all and power outages are frequent in some

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parts of the country. This increases the risk of security and fraud issues.

COMMUNICATIONS CAPABILITIES:

¶7. (SBU) Most Ivoirians do not have land telephone lines. Currently, the mobile phone network is insufficient for the demands of the population. The day of elections, all mobile phone networks are sure to be blocked from overuse. Many small villages have neither mobile phone access, nor land lines. All of these issues leave the local CEI offices with few options to communicate urgent problems with the home office during the election period. Looking for solutions, Beugre suggested that the CEI use the UN, FANCI, and Licorne telecommunications systems during polling.

MOBILITY:

¶8. (SBU) Voters will need to get to polling locations and the local CEI offices will need to transport ballot boxes. However, the roads in Cote d'Ivoire are inadequate and there are not enough bridges. Beugre cited examples where villagers had to go 150 kilometers out of their way to cross a river. He said that commercial transporters are willing to help with the transport of voters, ballots, equipment etc., but only if they will be paid on time and fairly.

SECURITY:

¶9. (SBU) During the June 2 "Friends of the Elections" meeting, Beugre pointed out that security will have to be increased at polling locations and citizens will need to be aware of what security measures have been put in place. However, the police and gendarmerie lack vehicles themselves and it is uncertain that they will be able to secure all of the voting locations.

IDENTIFICATION:

¶10. (C) At the same meeting Alain Lobognon, the FN Vice President of the CNSI), made a combative speech about the importance of getting the Prime Minister to be more aggressive in the identification process. (More than half of Ivoirians still do not have the citizen identification cards

they need to register to vote -- Reftel). During the May pilot identification project, 3137 people were promised certificates of nationality, but even this is still one step removed from the identification cards they need to vote. Another CNSI official commented that the June 2 meeting was timed too early because the CEI needs to be pressing harder for identification first. Stoudman forcefully countered that at four months away from elections, the meeting was in fact too late.

SHOW ME THE MONEY

¶11. (C) None of these problems can be resolved without money. But Prime Minister Banny, who is also the Minister of Finance, has not yet given the CEI any operating funds. A member of the commission confirmed to us that their overall budget has been approved for 50 billion CFA (USD 98 million dollars). About 38 billion CFA would go to operational activities and 6 billion CFA to the CEI's administrative costs. Another 5 billion CFA is earmarked for paying off the debt of the last CEI. However, none of these funds have yet been released. Banny could give the CEI money each month and it is unclear why he has not chosen to do so. Indeed, the CEI was only able to pay for their May activities thanks to USD 100,000 they received from the EU.

INFIGHTING AND TURF FIGHTING

¶12. (C) Harmony, never plentiful in the Ivoirian political environment, seems lacking among the electoral actors as well. The Prime Minister has not been closely involved with the CEI. He has sent low-level technicians to important meetings without a clear message from himself. More troubling, he has effectively paralyzed the organization by not funding it. The CNSI should be working as a tandem with the CEI but Lobognon's aggressive comments at the meeting suggest underlying tensions. Indeed, within the CEI itself there have been tensions, though contacts on the commission tell us that relations among commission members are improving.

¶13. (C) COMMENT: The road to elections is a complicated process paved with budgetary shortfalls and logistical challenges. The lack of urgency among the Ivoirian actors (four months away, they don't have even a notional timetable) suggests a lack of realism about what the process involves. Bureaucratic and political fighting are sure to become more prominent as each office and actor competes for resources, the spotlight, and their own political agendas. The lack of urgency among the Ivoirian actors suggests a lack of realism about what the process involves. Time to prepare for

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elections by October is running short. END COMMENT.

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